

PROPER #21...Series B
The Church of the Good Shepherd (9-25-2021)

Text: Mark 9:38-50

Title: **The Warfare Continues...**

A young woman (who was an incredibly faithful member of the parish and attended worship every Sunday) woke up one morning with an intense migraine headache. It was so debilitating that she was unable to get out of bed. So, her husband went to church without her. When he returned, she inquired about the priest's homily. He said, "*Mother preached about SIN*". She responded, "*Well, what did she have to say about sin?*". He replied, "**She's AGAINST it**"...

If your hand causes you to sin...cut it off; or if your foot causes you to sin...cut it off; or if your eye causes you to sin...pluck it out!

Someone once said that the words of Jesus, recorded in the four New Testament Gospels should not always be taken LITERALLY...but they should always be taken SERIOUSLY! These words, from the 9th chapter of the Gospel of Mark are a classic illustration of that principle of Biblical interpretation. In the long history of the interpretation of this passage of scripture, to my knowledge, there has never been a Biblical scholar who has suggested that Jesus' words be taken literally. It is obvious that Jesus is speaking metaphorically/symbolically when he says, "*if your hand or foot cause you to sin...cut them off; and if your eye causes you to sin...pluck it out*". Clearly, Jesus is not suggesting amputation or self-mutilation as an effective remedy in a disciple's warfare against sin...these words are not to be taken literally...but they most certainly are to be taken very SERIOUSLY!!

Jesus' uncompromising (and some would say, incomprehensible) word in today's Gospel is a reminder of the seriousness of sin, and a recognition of the "toxic power" of sin to not only ruin our relationship with God, but also to ruin and derail our relationships with our fellow human beings. So, using symbolic language, Jesus is teaching us that the strenuous life of Christian discipleship involves a never-ending/ life-long struggle against the reality of sin... But what is SIN?? According to the Catechism of the Episcopal Church (pg. #848 in the Book of Common Prayer) Sin is "*the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation*". In seminary I learned that we are not sinners because we commit sin...we commit sin because we are sinners". Let me say that again, so it has an opportunity to sink in: "We are not sinners because we commit sins (because we rebel against God and we do nasty things (some consciously some unconsciously) every day" NO...we commit sins (we rebel against God and do nasty things) because we are SINNERS". We have a disease (all of us...every human being); a virus that can not be treated by a vaccine! The disease is called SIN and there has never been (nor will there ever be) a time when we were not infected with this virus. And in today's Gospel, Jesus is teaching us that there is no sacrifice is too costly; no price too high to pay in a disciples struggle against sin...what he is saying (metaphorically is that it is better for a disciple to "*Limp into Life than it is to go Leaping into Hell*"....it is better, far better for a Disciple to "*Limp into life than to Leap into Hell*"!!

On June 14th, 1944, Allied forces under the command of General Dwight Eisenhower, launched the Normandy invasion. Most historians recognize that this successful invasion of Europe marked the "Beginning of the End" for Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich...but the war continued for another 333 days, until, on May 8th, 1945 when Germany unconditionally surrendered, and the war was finally over. Well, the same could be said about our struggle against sin. Jesus' sacrifice @ Calvary means that the outcome has been decided; his death on the cross marked the "*Beginning of the End*" of our struggle with sin/death and the devil...but the war is not yet over...the battle rages on!!

If your hand causes you to sin...cut it off; or if your foot causes you to sin...cut it off; or if your eye causes you to sin...pluck it out...it is better...FAR BETTER for you to Limp into Life than to LEAP into Hell...

You know, there is a strange kind of irony in these words of Jesus recorded in the 9th chapter of Mark. Because, in the end, the one who was mutilated; the one whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for human sin was not our bodies and our blood...it was the one who said, "*take extreme measures...cut off hand and foot and pluck our eyes if they cause you to sin*" who was "*wounded for our iniquity/bruised for our transgressions and by whose stripes we are healed*"! My friends, Jesus' words in today's Gospel remind us that the only grace which is worth anything is **COSTLY GRACE**; and the great Good News that we can (and should) celebrate this morning is that the Grace Jesus offers; the Grace, he invites us to receive; the Grace given in the waters of Baptism and the bread and the wine of the Holy Eucharist is **AMAZING** precisely because it is so **COSTLY**...because it is so **FREE**...**AMEN+**